2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

756 534 The Siberian single-headed drum, to which type the Yakut drum belongs, ranks high among primitive musical instruments. The Yakut very seldom use it for amusement. It is primarily an instrument for shamanistic performances.

The drum is very skilfully handled for ritual purposes. It is held with the wider part of the oval upward. The volume of sound depends on the distance from the rim. The farther from the rim the stroke falls, the deeper is the sound.

The Siberian drum has no appliances for tightening its membrane, as is the case with two-headed drums, or with some kinds of tamborines; therefore its sound effects may be distinguished rather by the time and force than by their pitch. This defect may be overcome to some degree by frequent warming of the drum.

● 533 756 In the intonation of the shaman's voice all sound elements, volume, tempo, and pitch may be found. His voice is particularly strong when he strives to inhale from the patient the malevolent beings causing the sickness. Then his voice resembles the cries of a man struggling with a deadly danger.

According to Vitashevsky, the pitch intervals are smaller than those of our musical system. After recording the Yakut songs he tried to reproduce them on a violin, but the Yakut did not recognize them.

755 *A Shamanistic Performance.* Vitashevsky gives a vivid description of a performance at which he was present.[1] He came too late to see its initiation, called *oloxxo oloror* (on the seat he is seated) and, he understood, at this point the shaman's voice and the drum beats should be weak and almost listless. When he entered the earth hut the shaman was sitting on a small bank in its eastern corner, so that he had to pass between him and the fireplace. The shaman wore his shamanistic coat and his assistant dried the hut master's drum by the fire. The shaman asked for a tobacco pipe. He inhaled the smoke several times and asked for the drum and stick which were given to him. He rose, walked a few steps, and jerking his shoulders and head up and down, he tried to beat the drum, but rejected it because it was wet. He asked that his own drum be dried. This was done very quickly. Evidently his drum was already dry.

Now began the second or preliminary stage, called *mäñiyär* and *sürgüyar*[2] when the shaman searched for the direction in which to locate

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[1] Vitashevsky, N. A., Observations of Performances of Yakut Shamans (*Publications du Musée d'Anthropologie et d'Ethnographie de l'Empereur Pierre le Grand Près l'Académie des Sciences de Russie*, vol. 5, pp. 165–196, Petrograd, 1918, in Russian), 177.

[2] These are called shamanistic objects, as for instance, *jalbyr*, a willow with three branches to which hair from the tail of a white horse is tied. The *jalbyr* is used instead of a drum by some shamans and serves as a horse for their journey to the subterranean world.

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

east, the seat of the "creators." Blood sacrifices were made only to evil deities and not to the "creators." In front of the altar stood the steward with the owner of the drove and his wife on either side of him. All three faced east where dwell the benevolent deities. In a row on the right side of the altar stood nine innocent youths and on the left nine virgins with goblets filled with kumiss consecrated to the benevolent deities. The participants were clad in splendid festival attire, trimmed with valuable fur, silver pendants, and other decorations.

The steward addressed a prayer to the "creators," begging for blessings: increase of horses and cattle, a good harvest of hay, good health for the people and animals, and an abundance of food. Then he took the kumiss festival ladle (*ysyax xamyyaha*) and made a libation, in the direction of the dawn, to the benevolent deities. Then, while making a libation to the ground, he addressed the local deity, "the owner of the place" (*ān doidu iccitā*), asking him not to harm the inhabitants of the spot and the members of the clan. After that, the steward, with the help of the sacrificial ladle, proceeded to prophesy. He threw the ladle towards the sky, and if it fell with the bowl part upwards, it portended the granting of future abundance by the deities and all the people uttered the joyful, cry, *Uru!*

Then, according to the directions of the steward, the boys and girls gave the goblets of sacrificial kumiss to the elder and honored members of the clan, both male and female, who placed themselves to the right and left of the altar, drank from the goblets and passed them on to the less important and the younger people. Behind every honored or aged member of the clan, sat or stood his domestics, less esteemed relatives, young men, and laborers, whose welfare was his responsibility. When the goblet was emptied, it was returned to the steward or host to be filled.

At the same time, not far from the altar, other stewards were preparing tables, or simply boards on the ground, on which were placed piles of horse and cow meat and dishes of melted butter. Every chief of a family or clan received a large portion of meat and butter, which he divided among his people.

The whole day passed with songs, round dances, games, races and other contests, and shamanistic performances. The poetical choral songs of the young men and girls, in praise of the spring and love, were very interesting. Middendorff[1] and Sieroszevski[2] recorded some of these songs. During the kumiss festival the change from winter to spring was

[1]Middendorff, *ibid.*, Part 2, 1575.
[2]Sieroszevski, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, 587 et seq.

6: Sauer--32-33 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 101, 103, 533

"In crossing a very boggy spot our guide [RCH: a Yakut] sung a melancholy song, which was thus interpreted: 'This is the sad spot that was moistened by the tears of the venerable Tshogonnoi. The worthy old man! most skilful in the chace, and the constant protector of his friend. 'Twas here that, unable to support the fatigues of the journey, his companion, his friend, his last horse, fell. He sat down by the side of his last horse, and vented his anguish in the bitterest of tears: Yes, the bitterest of tears; for he never failed in the duties of a Sochalar (1). He never deserved to weep. [33](The

1. The Yakuti call themselves Socha, and the singular is Sochalar.

third day he was relieved by a traveller and assisted home).' The name of the place is Tshogonnoi Utabyta (the tears of Tshogonnoi)."

7: Shklovsky -- 55-56 T-3 (1891-92) 1916 Yakut-1-2
116, 522, 533, 584

"Everything comes to an end, even a Yakut's appetite; and there came a moment when even the 'lean ones' refused more food and the old people fell down, overcome with sleep and repletion. [RCH: at the end of a wedding] The young people had long been awaiting this moment, and now they went out into the meadow and formed themselves into two separate ranks, men in one, and girls in the other. With decorous and mincing steps these two living walls slowly approached each other.

'Ho, boys, ho! Let us enjoy ourselves while we are young! ' chanted one of the men.

'Sing aloud, my throat!' sang a girl.

'Boys, let us dance and laugh while we are still unwed; ere yet the sinews of our strength are drawn out by a woman's little tongue! '

'Girls, let us play while we are still unwed, while we are yet uncaught by the coarse hands of men!'

This was all improvised. Jests, at times coarse, [56] were freely bandied about. On hearing the merry voices some old women, mostly blind, came out of the hut. Their extreme thinness, their unkempt grey hair, their blind eyes and strange dress, gave them a most fantastic appearance, reminding one of the terrible Druid priestesses mentioned in Michelet's 'Histoire de France. ' The old women listened attentively to the young people's hokes, and they also improvised songs in which they made mention of lost youth, the sweetness of man's embrace, and the sorrow of infirmity. I quote one of these improvisations which I noted down at the time, as a specimen of the wild poetry breathed by

these untutored songs:

'How welcome is the warmth of the sun to my aged bones! How joyful to dance with you, my children! This may be the last time I shall sing. Soon will the earth cover my sightless eyes. Next year again you will come here to play, but on my grave the young grass will be green. Cold shall I be there, nor can the hearth fire warm my old body. Dance and sing then, O youth!'

She sang with wild energy: 'And I too will dance with you for the last time. For the last time I shall drink the koumiss, and next spring you will gather here again in the sunlight. Then you will remember the old woman, and she will rejoice in her cold grave. She will hear your songs and from the grave her darkened eyes will see you drink the koumiss. And her happy bones will dance to your merry songs.'

7: Shklovsky -- 56-57 T-3 (1891-92) 1916 Yakut
116, 524, 533, 831

"[RCH: after a wedding attended by the author] Besides improvisations, they sang the customary songs, some of which expressed unbridled licentiousness and sensuality, the utmost plainness of language [57] being employed. Others, on the contrary, were delicate and sad."

16: Great Britain Admiralty --165 G-3 (no date) 1920 Yakut
116, 181, 191, 426, 533

"The mode of speech of the Yakuts is slow, disconnected and abrupt. They are described as good-tempered, orderly and hospitable, with more energy than their countenances suggest. They are capable of enduring a long strain, and are patient under privation; but they lack independence, and need stimulus: it is said of them: 'the more you beat them, the better they work.' They are apt to fall into debt, mostly to their own fellow-countrymen, for the more enterprising among them have earned the reputation of being the Jews of Siberia. They are fond of noise, song and dance; their improvised songs have deadly monotony as they consist of eternal repetitions of one phrase."

17: Erman--292 N-3 (1828-29) 1850 Yakut -1-2
116, 533, 175, 651, 177.65 Russia
636.65

"I have already mentioned a census of the indigenous population, which had been made the preceding year in the northern part of the government of Tobolsk. A similar work was now going forward in Eastern Siberia, and I met in Yakutsk with three excellent men who were employed in its execution. Of these, M. Pyatuitki alone was connected with the finance department in St. Petersburg, while MM. Tásken and Slòbin, from the mines of Nerchinsk, were associated with him, in order to afford him the opportunity of becoming acquainted with whatever mineral riches might exist in the tracts of country gone over. The main object of the expedition was to make a new assessment of the yasak or fur tribute for the several families and tribes of the indigenous population; and we were told thay they were instructed by the government to deal with the people in the mildest possible manner. Yet they had been able to increase the yasak every where throughout the tracts occupied by the Yakuts and Tunguzes along the Upper Lena, as the number of inhabitants had increased there considerably during the last fifty years. It is said that the same result is obtained for all Siberia taken together, and that exceptions are to be found only in localities where endemic diseases prevail, as in the case of the Verkhovian Ostyaks. I heard on this occasion of a particular kind of numerical notation, invented during the present intercourse with the aboriginal tribes, and in which the new assessments were expressed and enjoined to the several communities, and the old accounts settled. It consisted of only six different figures, which represented furs

to the value of 5 and 10 kopeks, and of 1, 10, 100, and 1000 roobles respectively. When the amount of the assessment was agreed on, it was written in these runes on paper, and then cut on wooden staves as permanent memorials, as the Ostyaks and Votyaks are accustomed to do in their private transactions. To the inhabitants of remote and secluded yurts this was obviously an event of great importance, and worthy to form an epoch in their history. The Yakuts celebrated it in extemporaneous songs, of which a Russian interpreter preserved this fragment: 'The commission erected its throne with us for the good of all; receive it well, ye other tribes, that ye also may be dealt with wisely.'"

17: Erman--302-303 N-3 (1828-29) 1850 Yakut-1-2
116, 533, 153, 821

"The teachers in the schools in Yakutsk, informed me that in their Yakutian scholars was to be remarked a singular aptitude for mechanical arts; but that, on the other hand, it was vain to think of teaching them arithmetic, or any such logical acquirements. Other Russians, who were as well acquainted with the language of the Yakuts as with their own, told me that the songs of those people often contain very remarkable passage of a character which we should call romantic. Thus, they assume that 'the trees of the forest hold discourse with one another; and other inanimate things with men.' These poetic fantasies pass away, for the most part, just as they arise, for whether on a journey, or in cheerful humour at home, every one sings the new impressions made on him at the moment, by the objects around him. They have for that purpose a kind of song consisting of only two notes; these are repeated frequently in such a way that the higher note follows the lower till towards the end of each part or verse, when their order is reversed. The whole air sounds so melancholy, that I often thought that I heard some one in the town wailing aloud, when, in fact, it was only the extemporaneous song of the Yakuts. It is not unlikely that my occupations have lived for the moment in Yakutian verses. The men inhabiting the yurts near our residence, used to come every night to the yard, to observe the use made of the transit instrument, and they[303] soon made up their minds as to its purpose. They were of opinion that I was reckoning the stars, and wrote down each of them in the account; that, in fact, a star had been lost in St. Petersburg, and I had been sent to try whether it could be found again

in any part of the earth. This story spread through the town, in the first instance, so generally, that even Russians asked me whether it was well founded; it then made its way over the country, even as far as the Tunguzes."

20: Czaplicka--116-117 E-3 (1915-16) 1916 Yakut-1-2
116, 533, 535, 585

"This dance[RCH: i.e., the dance performed at Yakut weddings] is called by the Tungus ikandzyedzyem ('I sing'), in reference to the monotonous chanting which accompanies it. A large circle is formed of men and women, not necessarily in alternation, or sometimes men and women from separate circles. Each puts the right arm under a neighbour's left, the arms being bent so that the clasped hands are brought close together in front of the body. Then all together, keeping time to the refrain,[117] move the left foot sideways in a short step, at the same time throwing the upper part of the body slightly forward. The right foot is then brought behind the left, this movement being accompanied by a slight backward jerk of the body. The double movement of the feet, left first, then right, carries the whole circle round from right to left, clockwise, and an alternate left and right swing of the hips accompanies the forward and backward movement of the body. This circling goes forward for hours, some of the dancers occasionally dropping out, while others take their places.

There is always a leader who chants a sort of recitative with words of his own (or borrowed from some well-known expert in the dance), and the refrain is taken up energetically by all the dancers in chorus--

Haiko--haikan!
Oho--gaikan!

20: Czaplicka--116-117 E-3 (1915-16) 1916 Yakut-2
116, 533, 535, 585

Handikadzyem!
Yahore, yahore,
Yahore, y-a-a-a!

All the words of this refrain are meaningless, with the exception of handikadzyem, 'I am going faster,' an exhortation to quicken the tempo."

24: Wrangell--34-35 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 533, 782, 824

"Our way led over a hill covered with pines, and I noticed that several old trees near the path had tufts of horsehair fastened to their branches, and that a number of sticks were stuck in the ground near them. The leading postillion here got off his horse, plucked a few hairs from his mane, and [35] fastened them to one of the branches with much solemnity. He told us that this was a customary offering to the spirit of the mountain to obtain his protection during the journey, and that foot-passengers placed a stick in the ground with the same intention. This is a general practice among the Jakuti, and is even persevered in by many who have professed Christianity. My Jakuti sang almost incessantly. Their style of singing is monotonous, and rather melancholy, and is quite characteristic of this gloomy and superstitious people: their songs describe the beauties of the landscape in terms which appeared to me not a little exaggerated, and which I attributed at first to a poetic imagination; but my sergeant informed me it was customary thus to try to propitiate the spirit of the mountain by flattering encomiums on his territory."

38: Dobell--43 G-2 (1812-13) 1830 Yakut
116, 533

"Their music may be said to be as devoid of melody as that of the Chinese."

45: Lesseps--298-299 T-2 (1788) 1790 Yakut
116, 533

" Their music is by no means agreeable, and consists of a monotonous and continual shake in the throat. They are however great improvvisatori. Their words cost them no labour or efforts of genius, and the subject is derived from whatever passes before them, or occurs to their mind. If a [299] bird flies by their side, they will make a song of it that shall last for an hour. Not that their imagination accumulates ideas; the song, on the contrary, is nothing more than an endless repetition of the words, Lo! the bird in his flight!

The Yakuts are very fond of eloquence. The ability to make a good speech at a meeting is highly regarded, and the speaker is greeted with cries of approval. 537

With regard to the songs (yrya), the melodies are simple and monotonous, but there are different genres, and the images are often artistic. It is possible to sing love songs (for girls and boys), dance songs, humorous songs, shaman songs, and so on, as well as improvisations, when a person tells in song what he has been doing or seeing. The motif of this kind of song is very simple and usually consists of two or three repeated notes. 533

The Yakuts did not have any other kind of music, apart from vocal. There were no musical instruments, leaving aside the shaman tambourine and the khomus, a small iron jew's-harp known to more or less all the peoples of the Old World. [534]

The dances of the Yakuts are very original. Particularly interesting is a round called the *okyorun*, performed during festivals. 535

The dancers stand in a circle arm in arm and in time to the singing move with majestic steps to the left, in the direction of movement of the sun. There were variations of this dance in different localities. There were also various dancing games.

Ornamental art attained a high level of development among the Yakuts. The carving of wood and mammoth ivory; the casting and stamping of silver, copper and gold; the embroidery and appliqué of leather and fabric; fur appliqué and mosaic; the weaving of horsehair: all these were arts performed with materials available to the Yakuts and in which the craftsmen showed particular artistic taste and skill. Basically there was no graphic art for other than decorative purposes among the Yakuts, just as in the folk art of the past as a whole, if we disregard the animal, and human figures made by the shamans, and the later carved sculpture made in imitation of Russian examples. 531 532

The style of the Yakut design was original, although it contained Tungus, Mongol and other elements. Geometric motifs predominated, at times rather intricate ones. On the carved wooden vessels we find circular designs consisting of straight, serrated and wavy lines with points, dashes and so on, covering almost the entire surface. In the stamping, casting and birchbark carving, there predominate symmetrical, rounded figures, such as hooks, meanders, pincer-shapes, and so on, with linear squares, concentric circles and so forth. Very typical is a design found on scoops and saddlecloths; here one is struck by the central two-horned lyre—a purely Yakut motif. 531

The darkening of silver, and the painting of wood and alder with a concoction of alder, were developed.

In the selection of colors, preference was shown for black, red and, to some extent yellow and blue. The same preference was shown in the selection of fabric of the appropriate color.

* * *

Such was the culture of the Yakut people up to the October Revolution. 175

Particularly important was the cultural assistance which the Yakuts obtained from the fraternal Russian people during the prerevolutionary years. In the 19th century it was mainly the political exiles, beginning with the Decembrists, who spread culture through Yakutiya. There were also other progressive Russian people who diffused the beginnings of a cultivated way of life among the Yakuts. In particular, they laid the foundation of the Yakut written language. 177 212

55:Popov E-5 (no date) 1964 RV2 Yakut RV2
Dolgan

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[171]
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Women's chestpiece embroidered with colored beads.

of tales called ustuoruya (from the Russian word "istoriya" or history), in which the heroes were Russian merchants, poor state-owned peasants, Ivan Tsarevich and other characters from Russian fairytales. Their plots are also close to those of the Russian tales. The historical legends tell of journeys to strange countries and the unusual adventures involved. Some of them are close in content to the legends of the Olenek Khosun epic.

Both in theme and in method of narration, the epic tales were very close to the Yakut olonkho and were even called by the same name. They often describe a way of life alien to the Dolgans; they mention horses and cows, but hardly ever mention reindeer. Their theme is the struggle between heroes and persons consorting with evil spirits. The dialogues, just as in the Yakut epic tales, were sung. Dolgan songs are either short (lyrical) or long. The former were not performed by professionals, and the composers and performers were usually boys and girls. The long songs were performed by highly gifted improvisers or "songsters," who were relatively few and far between.

The storytellers were regarded as the elite, chosen by the good deities and spirits. Gifted storytellers created their own schools and whole generations of young storytellers studied under them. According to the old beliefs of the Dolgans, all the images drawn by the storytellers could be turned into visible images or shadows. This belief in the ability of the storyteller to re-create real images by his words was exploited by the Dolgan shamans to make their methods of "curing" the sick more convincing. Sometimes, to determine which spirit the disease had come from, the shaman would send for a storyteller. The latter would begin telling an epic tale as dusk fell. As soon as the hero of the tale began to gain the upper hand over his adversary, the spirit which had allegedly been eating the patient began to emerge to help his brother spirit. As soon as he saw the evil spirit and knew what kind it was, the shaman cast a spell, now knowing what he had to do to cure the sick person. During heavy epidemics shamans often resorted to the help of the storytellers by asking them to spend evenings telling stories in which all the adventures of the heroes had a happy ending. Since it was considered that the images in the epic tales became visible, in the spring, when the geese arrived, no stories were recounted so that the images would not frighten the geese. To avoid frightening wild deer, stories were not told on the eve of the hunt.

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The Dolgans had no musical instruments. It was only at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries that the Yakut jew's-harp began to